Report of the BAYS Species Working Group

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2021 Species Working Group Meeting

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Melanie King, Rapporteur

The BAYS Species Working Group met virtually on May 17, 2021, to develop recommendations regarding ICCAT's conservation, management, research, and data collection efforts for bigeye, albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack (BAYS) tuna stocks. The Working Group considered the results of ICCAT's 2020 correspondence process and recent work of ICCAT's Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS). The BAYS Species Working Group makes the following points and recommendations for the Advisory Committee's consideration:

Conservation and Management Recommendations

1. As part of its long-term strategy, the United States should seek to advance quota allocation negotiations for both bigeye and yellowfin that includes all major harvesters, sufficiently limits CPCs with purse seine interests, and suspends new entrants into fisheries for overfished stocks until such time as the stock recovers. For yellowfin allocation discussions, any small harvester exception considered should be *de minimis*. In developing such allocation schemes, U.S. fishing possibilities must be protected to ensure no additional limits to U.S. fishermen. In this context, the United States should continue to take every opportunity to reaffirm its longstanding position that the small harvester bigeye catch limit of 1,575 mt set forth in Rec. 16-01 remains applicable to the United States. One Member of the group suggested that the United States demonstrate flexibility in future allocation discussions to facilitate agreement on a longer-term allocation arrangement.

2. The United States should provide leadership, and potentially submit a proposal to Panel 1, in an effort to revise Rec. 19-02 to implement a new management system for tropical tunas. The measure should include enforceable TACs coupled with enhanced management of purse seine fisheries to provide a high likelihood (not less than 60%) of recovering bigeye within ten years and maintaining yellowfin in the green zone. It should also include an eastern Atlantic skipjack TAC based on recent catches. The measure should state support for the ongoing management strategy evaluation process toward adoption of a multi-stock management procedure for these stocks in 2024.

3. The United States should provide leadership, including by potentially submitting a proposal to Panel 2, to implement a fully specified management procedure for North Atlantic albacore, including an exceptional circumstances protocol.

4. The United States should support development of strong management objectives for tropical tunas that promote sustainable fishing (i.e., stocks in the green quadrant of the Kobe plot), with high probability (e.g., 70% likelihood), while maximizing long-term

annual catch so as to move forward with development of management procedures for tropical tunas in the Atlantic.

5. The United States should continue to pursue measures that limit bigeye and yellowfin catch on FADs, including by adjusting FAD deployment limits, as necessary, in conjunction with unique FAD identifiers, and in particular, by adjusting the Convention area-wide FAD closure to reflect the best available science and meaningfully reduce juvenile catches.

6. The United States should support the development of electronic monitoring as an appropriate means for achieving some level of increased observer coverage, particularly in the pelagic longline and purse seine fleets. In particular, the United States should support ongoing efforts by IMM and the SCRS to develop minimum EM standards for use in ICCAT fisheries that align with U.S. domestic requirements.

Research and Data Collection Recommendations

1. NMFS scientists should maintain their active leadership role throughout the completion of the bigeye assessment this year.

2. The United States should continue to promote a timely completion of MSE for consideration in managing the tropical tunas in the Atlantic, including by advocating that the ICCAT Commission provide full funding to the MSE effort.

3. NMFS Scientists should promote the ongoing development and thorough review of a tropical tuna index of juvenile abundance using FAD echo-sounder data, catch, and other available sources of data as well as a joint longline index of abundance. If additional information is required to achieve this, NMFS scientists should work within SCRS to advise the Commission on the data needs.

4. NMFS Scientists should encourage the SCRS to support scientific programs to improve population parameters (ageing, growth, and mortality) for the tropical tuna species, through long-term biological sampling, and deployment of conventional and electronic tags on these species.

5. NMFS Scientists should collaborate in ongoing efforts, led by other SCRS scientists, to develop an MSE for the western Atlantic skipjack, including by providing relevant data and fisheries indices that were previously developed for skipjack stock assessments.

6. United States should request that the SCRS include in its annual reports tables that show catches of bigeye by numbers of fish caught, broken down by CPC and gear type. If resources are available the same should be provided for yellowfin.

BAYS Species Working Group Meeting Participants

IAC Members:
Walter Golet (convener)
Scott Lenox (Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council)
Kevin McClain
Greg Stunz (Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council)
Alan Weiss
Nick Cicero

Technical Advisors:
Gene Bergson
Jaime Alvarado Bremer
Grantly Galland
Sundance Farrell (absent)

Other Attendees:
Melanie King (rapporteur, NMFS IASI)
Alexa Cole (Federal Commissioner)
Ray Bogan (Recreational Commissioner)
Glenn Delaney (Commercial Commissioner)
John Graves (IAC Chairman)
Katy Dalton (DOS OMC)
Deirdre Warner-Kramer (DOS OMC)
Craig Brown (NMFS SWFSC)
Shannon Cass-Calay (NMFS SWFSC)
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